

JOHN AND MARY REACH



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TEEN-AGE

John and Mary Reach the Teen Age

It would be easy if we could say, "Here is a recipe that will solve all of our problems concerning John and Mary as they reach the teen age." However, this cannot be done. In changing from dependent children to independent adults, John and Mary and Mother and Dad have to find the answers to many problems. One of life's biggest problems is to face reality. People do not become adults until they can substitute mature ways of doing and thinking for old childish actions and feelings. When we face the situation we realize:

1. All parents have problems.
2. All children have problems.
3. There is no one answer or solution to these problems.

For convenience we will divide our problems into two groups—problems that face Mother and Dad and problems that face John and Mary.

Problems That Face Mother and Dad

We must realize that parents are people—not all wise with a halo enshrining their head. Neither are they the gay young people of the teen-age group. They have their problems. Some of these problems arise from the husband-wife relationship, and some from parent-child relationship. These difficulties are expressed in many and varied ways. Mother and Dad may say, "Of course we love our children and want to help them. We want to be friends with them too, but that is becoming difficult. They seem to be trying to shut us out of their lives."*

One Mother Puts It This Way:

"When my children were younger, I had very little trouble with them. They knew I loved them and wanted only what was best for them. They accepted me as the authority in the family, and we got along without much friction. Now they are thirteen and fifteen. Even the younger disobeys, and if I correct the older one he says, 'Oh,—Mother, You're way out of date. You don't understand modern young people at all.' "**

A Father Presents This Problem:

"My fourteen-year old son has gotten so ill-mannered and unruly during the last year that we hardly know what to make of him. He scarcely seems like the same boy. He is impudent

* Katharine Whiteside Taylor—Do Adolescents Need Parents?

to me and even to his mother, and uses some of the most atrocious language. If we correct him, he goes out, banging the door after him, and doesn't come back for hours."*

Now let us turn to some of the problems that bother John and Mary and see if we can see their trouble. What do these children feel about this difficult situation?

Problems That Bother John and Mary

"We want a part in things. We don't want to be left out. We want to be recognized as persons and not treated as inferiors, in other words, not treated as little children. We want a part in the family affairs. We do not object to authority, but we want to know why. If there is a money shortage we want to know the details. We recognize the need of help in becoming self-managers, we realize we have many problems to face. We want to have a part in things."

A nineteen-year old member of a youth club writes a good summary of this situation in many present-day families:

"I think that parents try to make us too dependent on them. In their love for us, they become selfish and demanding; they want to keep us attached to them as long as possible. They try to spare us hardship and trouble—they expect us to learn from their experience. The result is that if we are suddenly thrust out on our own, we are utterly bewildered and incapable of adjusting ourselves to the world.

"I feel too, that parents are often too suspicious and distrustful of youth. We are ready to cooperate with our elders, but when we meet with this attitude on their part, we become antagonized and hostile. Thus a barrier is raised between parents and youth."*

As we work through our problems trying to find a solution let us keep in mind these two viewpoints, *those of the parents* and *those of John and Mary* and try to understand and accept the fact that there are two sides to these difficulties.

* Katharine Whiteside Taylor—Do Adolescents Need Parents?

Meeting These Family Problems

It is no easy task to solve these problems. Our first aim should be to permit each family member to grow physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally. Along with this aim should be a clear picture of what we want John and Mary to become, and ever so close to this is, what do John and Mary want most and what can they get that will be most desirable for them in adult life. What kind of person do we want them to be, and what kind of a person do they want to be? *At maturity do we want a self-reliant, clear thinking person, capable of facing life's problems or do we want them to run to Mom and Dad for help?*

One of the challenges to parents is to grow with the child. We learn how to care for the infant, then he is no longer an infant. No sooner is one pattern of parenthood learned than we must learn another, and perhaps a very different one. The hardest pattern of all seems to be the adolescent one. Then we need to become a counselor and an older friend who is able to face life honestly, make wise decisions, and accept results even when the outcome is not the most satisfactory.

During infancy the parent's emotional satisfaction and the child's feeling of security is gained from the parent's physical care and their guidance. As the child matures he must find more and more of his security in his own growing powers. If we prolong any stage of our guidance past the time when it is needed, we put a strain upon the relationship, and may lose some of our future opportunity to be friends with our children. If we can see ourselves growing with the child; if we can realize that we must change from *doing for* to *doing with*, it is possible to develop a new relationship with teen-agers based on comradeship and sharing of common problems. If we can work out a plan whereby such a relationship is realized it will bring strength and happiness to both parent and child.

Physical Needs

Before we can meet the social and emotional needs of John and Mary, certain physical needs must be met. The physical needs of the teen-age boy and girl are great. At this age, growth is made in spurts. At times one part of the body grows more than other parts. This is sometimes alarming to the boy or girl. One person* made this problem clear to a group by saying, "How would you feel if your nose suddenly started grow-

* Dr. D. A. Prescott.

ing and doubled in size?" Would you be alarmed? Yes—you would hurry to a doctor. This story may show us how concerned these young people become over body changes. This also gives us some idea of our responsibility in making clear to these boys and girls that their sudden spurts of growth are normal.

They are growing so fast that they tire easily. Their diet should include plenty of milk, eggs, wholesome breads and cereals, fruits and vegetables. Rich food should not be used freely due to their effect on digestion and elimination. Good habits of eliminating body wastes are important. Due to increased body activities, there will be more waste to throw off. Keeping the body clean, taking plenty of outdoor exercise, and eating an abundance of fruit and vegetables will help in meeting these needs.

Often longer hours of sleep are needed. Sometimes teen age folk are called lazy, when in reality they lack energy due to rapid growth, improper eating, lack of rest, and poor elimination.

Another big problem is knowing how to provide proper sex education. For many parents this is hard. Special references are given at the back of this bulletin. *Both fathers and mothers* should realize the importance of giving *definite* information to boys and girls before they become puzzled as to changes that take place in their own bodies. This will be easier if the child's earlier questions about sex have been answered clearly and frankly. Such information helps the young people realize the natural and normal development of their bodies. If the young person understands maturity he is likely to accept this change. It also gives him a feeling of security in knowing where to go for any additional information which he may need. Too much information concerning sex is picked up from undesirable sources.

Social and Self Needs

Feeling secure in the love of his parents is still the greatest need of John and Mary. They need to feel wanted regardless of what they have done, whether they have made a success or have not done so well at an undertaking.

One boy said, "You want the kind of parents you can take your problems to and be sure they will understand. You want your parents to love you. That is what home is—where some one loves you. Adolescents do want parents."*

* Katharine Whiteside Taylor—Do Adolescents Need Parents?



When John and Mary bring their problems to us, we should not show too much concern. It is best for them to do most of their solving, but help them to realize that we all have problems. Solving problems is a natural part of life and growth. A well known educator said the parent's part was "seeing through Johnny and seeing Johnny through."* Those fortunate boys and girls who *feel* themselves part of the family are close enough to their parents and other reliable adults to seek their help when it is needed, stand a good chance of keeping their balance. Adults find a sense of humor helpful in assisting them to accept the over assertiveness

* Dr. Frank S. Endacott

of youth and to relinquish their own authority at times. It is also a wonderful thing if you can laugh with them, especially if the joke is on you.

Confidence or Self-Assurance

Confidence in himself as an individual is, like other growths, developed gradually. The home is the place for this to start. Instead of saying, "John, you should be able to do a certain thing, Mary did that when she was younger," it is better to praise John for what he can do well. We all need some one to tell us when we have done a good job. We should never expect one child to be a musician, good speaker, or be a star in athletics just because his older brother or sister was. Let him be himself and develop his own abilities. In a family of musicians one discord needs some family activity in which he can excel. If this be sewing, cooking, or any every day task, see that the child is given credit and praise for this ability. Rather than finding fault with things not done so well, find the good, praise the child for it and give encouragement. Likely the poor work will be done better the next time.

Degree of Independence

This growth toward independence is another of the phases that has "growing pains" for both the teen-ager and his parents. It is not at all unusual for our John and Mary to be cocky and unruly at times. It will help us if we can remember that this impudence and disregard for our authority are not symptoms of a growing trouble, but merely our child's indication of his growth toward independence. "Cockiness" and rashness may be the first step toward emotional independence. It is also true that he likely feels as badly about his rudeness as you do. Of course now as in all cases a large amount of good old *common sense* will help the parent. We must remember that John and Mary cannot arrive at independent maturity all at once. They have to go through a lot of try-outs. In one case the young adult may act like a grown up in another like a child. He needs practice until he can meet his experiences in a mature way.

The wholesome effect of a gradual preparation for the responsibilities of independence through practice in self-direction is brought out in the following adolescent narrative:

"When I did anything which was wrong, neither my mother or father looked upon it as criminal offense or something to be ashamed of. Instead, they tried to reason the matter out with me and show me why the thing I had done was wrong in place of punishing me and just telling me I shouldn't have done it. As a result of this attitude, I never tried to hide any of my misconducts in school from them. If I was kept after school for talking, I never tried to lie out of it by saying I stayed after school to help the teacher. My parents assumed the attitude that as long as I was active I would be getting into small difficulties. The one thing they did impress upon me was the fact that if I did get into trouble I must be willing to take the consequences, and above all things I must not lie to get myself out of it."*

Social Status

John and Mary have important growth to make in their association with people. They need to learn to get along with others. In order to work and play well with other people, we need to feel comfortable in their presence. It is not easy to be without consciousness of self in our relation with others unless we are secure (know we are loved) and have confidence in ourselves.

John and Mary need friends of their own age of both sexes. At no other time in their life are friends of their own age as important as now. This is their first step toward breaking away from their family.

It is a good thing to know enough about their friends, interests and activities to talk intelligently with them. However, we must be careful or these young folk will think we are prying into their business.

If things are told us in confidence, we should show John and Mary the respect we would any other people by keeping their secrets. Sometimes it might be amusing in fact a good joke—but if told, John and Mary will not appreciate your actions.

Home a Place For Each Age Group

This is a direct every day challenge to us as parents. A friendly happy family in an orderly, yet liveable home is a fine place for teen age people to be. If John and Mary feel "at-home" with Mom and Dad they will enjoy having their friends visit them.

* Understanding The Teen Age—Alma Jones, Iowa Extension Service.

The writer once heard a teen-age person say, "Parents should understand we need both boy friends and girl friends. Let us choose them for ourselves, and make them all feel welcome at our house. Of course, we want Dad and Mom to know our friends and be in the house when they're here, but not hang around all the time. We want to have some fun in our own way. Then we feel like staying home more."

Community Recreational Opportunity

Many people are critical of how our young people spend their leisure time. There is criticism of the commercial recreation places. The thing that usually is happening is that the young folk are using the available recreation. Communities and leaders have a real challenge when this is the case. We should use foresight in making plans and carrying them out to meet this need. One important thing to keep in mind is that John and Mary have a mind of their own. They do not want a program "cut and dried" and handed to them. Give them a part in planning and running the activities. Another thing to remember is that too many adults looking on can spoil an evening for the young people. Have an understanding adult or two about, but they should stay in the background.

Conditions vary so much in communities that no one plan will fit everywhere. Adults might sponsor orchestras, choruses, dramatics, 4-H Clubs, Sunday Schools and other youth groups. These activities will provide growth and wholesome contacts and recreation in addition to skills learned while securing information. When a recreational program is established these suggestions might help: Obtain public attention to the desirability of a teen-age recreational project through meetings, newspaper articles, public announcements, and other means.

Encourage youth's participation in planning the recreation they want, deciding on wholesome hours, refreshments, and similar problems.

Don't permit the idea to develop "We're going to save you from delinquency."

In the interest of self-government, the rules should be written and enforced by youth with adult counsel.

The clean-up, and other preparatory work done by youth themselves gives them a feeling that this is their project.

Younger and older youth may have different times assigned for their activities, rather than try to stretch one program for all interests.

Adults who are active in supervision must be of a type accepted and liked by young people.

Teen age community recreation should supplement and not supplant the home, school, and church leisure activity programs.*

A socially mature person balances his work and play. He finds happiness in work and enjoys leisure in ways that are worthwhile to himself and others. He does not make the mistake of taking too much time for recreation, or of not taking any at all. Let us help our youth to see the true values.



Spiritual Growth

In no phase of personal life is it more important to respect the feelings of John and Mary than in their religion. They are developing their understanding of a living religion.

* Youth in a Changing World—Alma Jones, Iowa Extension Service.

They particularly need the feeling of belonging to a religious group as they break away from the family. As John and Mary grow in their ability to think, they want to understand their relationship to other people and to their world. Religion, to really mean something, must be a positive thing—not a don't do this, don't do that. It must show itself in every day relationship.

Dr. Thom stresses the importance of it in the following statement: "There is no time when life presents so many doubts and indecisions as during the adolescent years. Too many young persons lives become a perplexing problem as their earlier hopes and aspirations turn out to be day dreams. There is a tendency for them to be overwhelmed with the futility of effort. The child who has had the advantage of living in a home with a religious background—that type of religion which is practiced as well as preached and which teaches the individual to think in terms of others than himself—finds that something very fundamental and important has been woven into the moral fabric of his personality. Religion helps to give to the boy or girl that sense of security and worthwhileness about life both present and future that the maturing individual needs."*

Avoid Comparison and Pushing Beyond Ability

In mental and educational growth, we should keep in mind that individuals vary. Sometimes the mind develops slowly, sometimes rapidly. We should think of individual growth and always avoid comparison to others of his age or any age. Just because older brothers, sisters, or cousins did certain things at this age is no reason for us to expect John or Mary to do the same thing. They might do it equally as well or not at all well and yet be a perfectly capable person in other things. We might say to them take advantage of all opportunities for learning and you will be able to live a richer, fuller life, make adjustments and give service in a world that needs your help.

Let John and Mary Choose Their Own Vocations

Often parents are accused of choosing vocations for their sons and daughters. This does happen and sometimes the results are "square pegs in round holes." We should not insist upon John choosing law because grandfather was an

* D. A. Thom, *Guiding the Adolescent*, Children's Bureau Publication No. 225, page 93.

attorney. Nor should we try to live our own lives over in our children. Mothers have forced voice lessons on their Marys because they themselves had wanted this. Let the boys and girls themselves decide what they want to do. John and Mary might consider among other things these points:

1. How their personality traits fit them for the chosen occupation.
2. Whether they have individual abilities required by the chosen occupation.
3. That their sincere interests may help them to succeed or lack of interest hinder in their chosen occupation.
4. What opportunities does the chosen occupation offer?
5. What training is needed for the chosen occupation?
6. Is there sufficient time and financial backing to train for this vocation?
7. Is training center or school near enough to make training period convenient?
8. Does he or she prefer indoor or outdoor work?
9. Does he prefer to be his own boss or let someone else assume the responsibility?
10. Does the individual prefer working with people or things?

John and Mary Establish Cultural Values

We need to remember that the adolescent stage is a normal phase of growth and when John and Mary reach maturity they should have a philosophy or plan for life. They will need faith in themselves and society to develop a courage that will carry on in defeat as well as success. We need to help them create a life full of good things—such living is made not found. They want a satisfying personal life with friends, a good education for successful living, a job with pay satisfaction in it, a home and family of their own, and an opportunity to be of service in their community. This is the goal of John and Mary. Shall we help them reach it?

Books For Further Reading

Book	Author	Publisher
The Happy Family	Leoy & Munroe	Knopf Publishers, New York
Parents Can Be People	Dorothy W. Baruch	D. Appleton- Century Co., New York
Children Go To School	Dorothy W. Baruch	Scott, Foresman & Co., New York
Personal Problems of Everyday Life	Travis, Lee E. & Baruch, Dorothy W.	D. Appleton- Century Co., New York
There's No Place Like Home	Ellenwood, James	Charles Scribner & Sons, New York
It Runs In The Family	Ellenwood, James	Charles Scribner & Sons, New York
Do Adolescents Need Parents?	Taylor, Katharine W.	D. Appleton-Century Co., New York
Learning To Live Untying Apron Strings	Tylor & Others	Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., New York.
On Being a Real Person	Hogue, Helen	Scribners, New York
Understanding Our- selves	Fosdick, Harry E. Schacter	Harper Bros., New York McKnight & McKnight Bloomington, Ill.
Psychology of Adol- escents	Luella Cole	Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., New York

Sex Education

- From Boy to Man**—American Social Hygiene Association.
- Growing Up in the World Today**—Emily O. Clapp.
- Mother Answers a Morals S. O. S.**—Gladys Denny Schultz—
About Petting Parents' Answers to Children's Sex Ques-
tions—Katherine Hattendorf.
- Planning for Sex Education**—Helen Southard.
- Sane Attitude Toward Sex**—Edith G. Neisser and Ethel L.
Victor.
- Sex Education for the Adolescent**—G. W. Corner and Carney
Landis.
- Sex Education for the Pre-School Child**—H. E. Jones and
Katherine Read.
- Sex Education for the Ten Year Old**—M. Marjorie Bolles.
- We Grow Up**—U. S. Public Health Service.
- When Children Ask About Sex**—Child Study Assn. of America.
- Your Own Story**—Marion Faegre—(For younger children and
parents).
- Love at the Threshold**—Frances Bruce Strain—Appleton-
Century Co., N. Y.
- Petting Wise or Otherwise**—Clark—Assoc. Press, N. Y.

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